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OUR WAR WITH GERMANY

XIII

(March 5—March 31)

THE twelfth month after the American declaration of war against the Imperial German Government closes in the midst of the most critical situation that has developed since the opening days of the great struggle, nearly four years ago. As this is written—on the eve of April 1,—the long heralded and somewhat sceptically regarded German spring offensive has been on for ten days, and has driven the British and French lines back on a front of fifty miles and for a maximum distance of nearly forty miles, but that is of course not the average. The attack opened on March 21, on the famous Cambrai salient. For the first three days progress was slow, although the Germans brought into the fighting upwards of ninety divisions, aggregating considerably more than a million men, and supported them with vast concentration of artillery and big guns. The British lines received the brunt of the assault. Gradually they were forced back under sheer weight of numbers, fighting very gallantly, until the whole territory taken a year ago, at the time of the famous Hindenburg "strategic retreat," was again in German hands. Bapaume, Peronne, Noyon, Montdidier and a number of other battle-scarred places are again in the hands of the Huns.

But as this is written certain events making for renewed confidence in the power of the Allies yet to beat the Germans have occurred. The greatest of these is that unity of Allied command has been accomplished at last, in the appointment of General Ferdinand Foch, chief of the French General Staff, and French representative in the Supreme War Council of the Allies, to be generalissimo of the Allied forces in France. He is therefore at the head of the French, British and American armies.

Another event of much importance in this connection is that on this day, for the first time since the offensive began, the German assaults, although continued with vigor and insistence, were all repulsed, and the British and French positions restored to the ground given up the day before.

And of consuming interest to Americans, whatever may be the appraisal of its importance to the result of the battle, is the fact that an American army of more than 100,000 intensively trained and thoroughly equipped men, the flower of General Pershing's forces, are moving forward to take their share in the battle. It is a smaller force than the British had at Mons, in September, 1914, but its injection into this battle means that after twelve months of preparation, we are at length able to strike a blow on land at our enemy. We are beginning to get into the war.

In the twelfth month of our war with Germany, as in the eleventh month, there was much talk of peace, but this time with a vast difference. In the eleventh month President Wilson was still carrying on his appeal to the Austrian and German peoples to express themselves, no matter what their governments said. This long range debate with Hertling and Czernin was abruptly dropped this month. A new line of peace talk, coming almost wholly from the German Kaiser, with occasional strong support from Field Marshal von Hindenburg or one or two German newspapers has taken its place. But the peace of which the Emperor Wilhelm speaks is one not easily recognizable in anything that President Wilson has had to say on the subject.

Having forced the helpless Bolsheviki of Russia to sign their ignominious confession of disgrace and disaster the Austro-German statesmen turned their attention to the even more helpless Roumania, and on March 5 Count Czernin, the peaceful tone of whose talk had seemed especially hopeful to the President, threatened the hapless little Balkan nation with extinction if it did not at once agree to peace on the Austro-German terms. These included the cession of the Dobruja to Bulgaria, and a "rectification" of the Austro-Hungarian frontier for "strategic reasons," which meant cession of territory to Austria.

Next day Kaiser Wilhelm sent a number of telegrams of congratulation to different notables upon the occasion of the "glorious conclusion" of the war on the eastern front. To King Frederick August, of Saxony, he said: "I feel the greatest gratitude toward God and the army which has extorted this peace. Firmly trusting in the sword I face a future which will, after all heavy sacrifices, bring us victory and a strong peace."

Two days later, on March 8, the Kaiser replied to a telegram of congratulations from Philip Heineken, director of one of the great German steamship lines, saying: "The German sword is our best protection. With God's help it will bring us also peace in the west, and indeed the peace which, after many troubles and much distress, the German people need for a happy future."

Hertling and Czernin may talk as they like of peace and the instruments for making it, but when the German Kaiser speaks, the German sword has its due recognition.

There was silence among the Germans on the subject of peace for two weeks after that message to Heineken. Then, on the eve of the great offensive, the Kaiser, Hindenburg and others of the German leaders sent numerous messages of encouragement to the faithful all over the Empire. Telegraphing on March 21 to the Provincial Council of Schleswig-Holstein the Kaiser said: "The prize of victory must not and shall not fail us—no soft peace, but one which corresponds with Germany's interests."

That same day Field Marshal Hindenburg telegraphed the Posen Provincial Council: "God willing, we shall also overcome the enemy in the west and clear the way to a general peace."

They made plain to their people what they expected from the great offensive. The prize must be great for the price in blood was certain to be very high. The best information obtainable is to the effect that the German losses have exceeded anything hitherto occurring in this frightfully costly fighting. So, on March 26, the fifth day of the drive,

the Kaiser said to his favorite newspaper man: "Every one out here is staking everything. Every one out here knows and trusts we shall win everything. All Germany fights for her future."

Cologne and Berlin newspapers of the next day reveal the effect which the daily reports of success were having upon the temper of the people at home. Or were they only setting a bait to tempt a war weary people to further frightful extravagances? "It is self-evident," says the Cologne *Volks-Zeitung*, "that after what is now happening we can no longer conclude peace on the terms we were ready to accept a week ago. The enemy must be brought to a submissive spirit, and forced to grant everything we need in the future, especially in colonies and raw materials."

And the *Deutsche Zeitung* of Berlin feels free to reveal again the real spirit which the war necessities of the last year or two have been forcing it to conceal. "Down with the worship of the peace god," it cries. "The cry of vengeance, and our truly German hatred of England is ringing with renewed force throughout the Empire. Down with England!"

That same day, March 27, the Kaiser, swelling with glory and the triumph of his victorious army, which, having driven everything ahead of it for a full week, until, apparently, it had created a situation such that no Allied counter-stroke was feared, telegraphed the vice-president of the Reichstag a message of joy and pride in which he once again disclosed the true reliance of his heart and the true purpose of his course.

"We have grievously shaken England's army, by God's help," he said. "May the German people, and especially their chosen representatives, derive confidence anew from these achievements that the German sword will win us peace. May it be recognized that what is now needed is that the people at home, too, shall manifest, by their fortitude, their will to victory. The coming world peace will then, through the German sword, be more assured than hitherto, so help us God!"

The peace of the German sword—a strong German peace! Hindenburg has the same idea and merely phrases it a little differently. The successes of that week of offensive had started the congratulatory wires to buzzing, and von Hertling had sent a message to von Hindenburg, to which the Field Marshal replied: "Proud to be fighting under the leadership and under the eyes of the Supreme War Lord our troops are battling in a manner above all praise. The army will not relax until, with God's help, it has won for the homeland the good victory which it needs as the foundation for a future based on a strong German peace."

The great offensive which produced this exultation and induced this self-revelation on the part of the Kaiser and his followers had been in preparation for four months or more. During that time, reports had been coming to Allied headquarters of a concentration of material behind the German lines. Despatches from the Allied front indicated a corresponding preparation to meet it. There were reports of the gathering of material, of the digging of new trenches and so on until it was said that our defenses were twenty miles or more in depth. Military experts spoke of the line as "practically impregnable."

As day after day went by, and week after week of favorable weather brought no development from the Germans, doubt began to

be expressed as to whether or not there would be a German offensive. Then, on the morning of March 21, it began, with a furious bombardment of gas and high explosives for five hours, followed by wave after wave of German infantry advancing in mass formation as they did in the fall of 1914, in the first days of the war. They came in numbers and with a determination that counted no cost and would not be denied.

At no previous stage of the war has there been such a concentration of men and artillery. The Germans outnumbered the British three or four to one everywhere, and in some places as much as eight to one. The drive was on a fifty mile front, from a little below Arras to just north of La Fere. Day by day as the drive continued the German claims rose—from 16,000 prisoners and 200 guns to 25,000 prisoners and 400 guns; at length to 75,000 prisoners and more than a thousand guns. And after the first recession each day added to the list of places again under Hun domination.

From the first there was expression of confidence among the Allies, for their line was bent but not broken, and the German wedge was never able to separate British from French. The fighting front grew from fifty to ninety miles, as the huge salient was developed by the German push. And every day there was talk of a great counter-stroke—"when the right time comes"—which shall take advantage of German exhaustion and throw them back.

The Germans signalized their drive by opening fire on Paris with a new long-range gun, which threw shells of about 9 inches calibre a distance of more than 70 miles. It fired slowly and at intervals of a quarter hour or more. The first day it did little damage, although a few persons were killed and others wounded. But on Good Friday one of its shells struck the roof of a church in which a considerable number of worshippers were gathered. The shell broke through the roof and masses of heavy stone and building material fell, killing about 75 persons, of whom 54 were women, and wounding 90 more.

The selection of General Foch for supreme command was first reported on March 29. That same day General Pershing called on him and placed all the American forces in France at his disposal. The week of the German drive had brought numerous appeals for American help. Mr. Lloyd George, the British Premier, sent a message through Lord Reading, the British special ambassador to this country, and various observers in Paris cabled despatches of similar tenor.

"The American people will be proud to be engaged in the greatest battle in history," said General Pershing to General Foch. Mr. Baker, Secretary of War, who had been in Europe for two weeks or more on a tour of inspection of the American forces there, and of consultation with our Allies, publicly expressed his satisfaction with General Pershing's course. At the same time President Wilson cabled his congratulations to General Foch upon his appointment, saying:

"Such unity of command is a most hopeful augury of ultimate success. We are following with profound interest the bold and brilliant action of your forces."

A day or two later Mr. Lloyd George, announcing in the House of Commons General Foch's selection, spoke of the inestimable advantage always enjoyed hitherto by the enemy in having a single command, and remarked that at last the Allies will fight as a unit.

The announcement that Mr. Baker had arrived at a French port was made in Paris on March 10. The War Secretary, upon reaching Paris, made public a brief statement in which he said that we "are committed with all our resources to winning the war." Two days later the War Department announced that every energy would be employed to speed up the sending of troops to France. On March 14, the Administration began formally taking Congress into its confidence by having the members of the Senate Committee on Military Affairs meet with the War Council for a general conference. The state of war preparation was discussed at this conference and the production charts were shown to the Senators. They disclosed that the talk of unsatisfactory progress in aircraft production which had been going on for some time was well founded. It was revealed that this work was 74 per cent. behind schedule. The President had had a special investigation made on his own account first by an individual and then by a special committee not connected with the Administration. Over half a billion dollars had been spent and less than a dozen aeroplanes of the fighting type had been sent to France. Of course, great equipment has been accumulated, plants for construction of aircraft and machinery have been helped or erected, and a great force of men has been organized in the aviation section of the signal corps. But battleplanes have not been sent to France.

The Aircraft Production Board began an inquiry of its own, and the Senate Committee on Military Affairs resumed its investigation of war preparations with special reference to aircraft production. On March 26 there was an outburst of bitter criticism in the Senate, in which it was said that instead of the 22,000 planes which were to have been sent to France by July, according to the estimates of last year when the \$640,000,000 appropriation was made, less than 50 actually would be sent. The estimate of last year had been cut down repeatedly, as time went on and it was seen that nothing like that figure could be accomplished. It had been dropped to 10,000, and then to 5,000, to 3,000 and even lower. But the actual figures given in the Senate debate were 37 to be shipped by July.

On March 20, President Wilson had a conference at the White House with the heads of several of the important war bureaus. The War Industries Board had been reorganized on March 5, under the chairmanship of Bernard M. Baruch. He headed the list of the President's advisers at this White House conference, accompanied by Mr. McAdoo, the Director General of railways; Mr. Hoover, the Food Administrator; Mr. Hurley, chairman of the Shipping Board; Mr. Garfield, the Fuel Administrator, and Mr. McCormick, chairman of the War Trade Board. It was intimated that the purpose of the conference was the co-ordination of war industries. Two days later the War Trade Board issued a long list of articles importation of which was placed under restriction as non-essential to the winning of the war.

On March 23 the Bureau of Ordnance of the War Department published a summary of the work of the Gun Division, showing anticipated and executed expenditures of \$2,000,000,000 covering the erection of sixteen large plants for the construction of mobile artillery and cannon. At the beginning of the war this Division consisted of three officers and ten civilians. At the end of 1917 it had 500 officers and

3,500 civilians and by the middle of this year it will have 1,500 officers and 10,000 civilians. Many thousand cannon have been ordered. Several of the new plants are nearing completion and gun forgings are now being delivered. In the Senate outburst on March 26 it was said that we had lost six months in the production of field artillery through attempting to improve the recoil of the French 75, generally admitted to be the best field gun in service. But having failed to make the improvement we are now making the gun from the French plans, and will presently have a supply of American made French field guns for our army.

This Senate debate also brought forth charges of delay and failure in the ship-building programme. In a speech in New York on March 26 Chairman Hurley, of the Shipping Board, gave a mass of figures tending to show that the ship-building programme was making very good progress. Sir Eric Geddes, first lord of the British Admiralty, had spoken in the Commons on March 20, and presented figures to show that the total net loss of world's tonnage from the beginning of the war to the end of 1917 was 2,500,000 tons.

Mr. Hurley pointed out the fact that the Shipping Board had been compelled to develop new means of constructing ships in order to carry on any building programme. When the United States entered the war 70 per cent. of the capacity of the existing ship yards of the country was occupied by naval construction, and the remainder by private contracts. There were then 37 steel ship yards in the country. The Board has located 81 additional steel and wood yards since then, and has expanded 18 others. The 37 old yards have increased their capacity from 162 ways to 195, and thirty new steel yards are in process of construction which will have an aggregate of 203 ship-building ways, making 67 yards with 398 ways that very soon will be in full operation. Similarly the 24 old wooden yards, with 73 ship ways have been increased to 81 yards with 332 ways completed or nearing completion. Thus there are now in sight 730 ship-building ways, of steel and wood, which is 521 more building berths than England has. This is an industry built new from the ground up in very large part. Plant construction is nearing completion and the ship-building programme will be in full swing in a short time.

Meantime, after negotiating in vain for months with the Dutch Government for the use of the Dutch ships lying in American waters, which aggregated some 500,000 tons, President Wilson issued a proclamation on March 20 requisitioning the ships and turning them over to the Navy Department and Shipping Board to equip, man and operate. It was estimated that about 200,000 tons of Dutch shipping was lying in ports of our allies, and it, too, was to be requisitioned for allied service. The President's proclamation said that the ships were to be used for essential purposes in connection with the prosecution of the war. They are to be armed, which means war zone service. The navy announced that it had the guns and crews ready.

Throughout the month there has been discussion of the possible intervention by Japan in Siberia to prevent the practical acquisition of that territory by German influences, and to save the vast stores of war material heaped up at Vladivostock and other points for which transportation to Russia in Europe was never available. Japan has

regarded the Russian disintegration and the advance of German influence toward the east as very menacing to her own interests and to the peace of the East. It has been reported from Tokyo and from Paris and other points that the British, French and Italians were united in desiring to have Japan intervene. But Washington has made it clear that President Wilson is not of that mind. On March 4 London reported that the British, French and Italian ambassadors at Tokyo were about to ask Japan to safeguard allied interests in Siberia. The next day it was intimated in Washington that we would not join in that request.

Despite the signing of peace treaties with the Bolsheviki and Ukrainians the Germans continue a steady advance into Russian territory. On March 8 the government-controlled Wolff news bureau of Berlin sent out a despatch saying: "We have acquired a direct free route via Russia to Persia and Afghanistan."

President Wilson, however, clings to the hope that something may yet be accomplished by the Russians. On March 11 he sent a message to the Russian people through the all-Russian congress of Soviets, expressing "the sincere sympathy which the people of the United States feel for the Russian people at this moment when the German power has been thrust in to interrupt and turn back the whole struggle for freedom and substitute the wishes of Germany for the purpose of the people of Russia." He assured the Russians that this Government would "avail itself of every opportunity to secure for Russia once more complete sovereignty and independence in her own affairs and full restoration to her great rôle in the life of Europe and the modern world. The whole heart of the people of the United States is with the people of Russia in the attempt to free themselves forever from autocratic government and become the masters of their own life."

Two days later the congress of Soviets voted, 453 to 30, to ratify the peace treaty with the Central Powers. On the same day it adopted a response to the President's message. It expressed the appreciation of the congress, first of all to "the laboring and exploited classes in the United States" for Mr. Wilson's message, and added: "The Russian Republic uses the occasion of the message from President Wilson to express to all peoples who are dying and suffering from the horrors of this imperialistic war its warm sympathy and firm conviction that the happy time is near when the laboring masses in all bourgeois countries will throw off the capitalist yoke and establish a Socialist state of society, which is the only one capable of assuring a permanent and just peace as well as the culture and well being of all who toil."

The day that message was received in Washington there came one from China to the effect that 20,000 Chinese troops would be ordered to Harbin and beyond to help guard against German aggression, and that the money for the expenses of this expedition would be found by Japan. Also there was a message from Japan reporting Premier Terauchi as saying in the Diet that intervention had not yet been decided upon. He added that the military situation had reached "a state of perfect preparedness."

On March 18 the Supreme War Council of the Allies, in Paris, issued a statement denouncing the German political crimes against Russia and Roumania and refusing to recognize the peace treaties. It

said that the war must be fought out "to finish once for all this policy of plunder, and to establish the peaceful reign of organized justice."

On March 21 Tokyo reported the assembling of the Elder Statesmen and the prospect of a Crown Council to consider intervention. Next day London suggested the possibility of allied intervention to allay distrust of Japan. And on the 24th General Terauchi replying to an interpellation in the House of Peers said: "The Government have not considered the question of intervention in Siberia. The Empire is not so powerless as to be frightened to such an extent by German penetration in the East."

Throughout the month there has been constant report of American activity on a small scale in the trenches in France. It was announced that our troops held trenches at four points, aggregating in all about four and a half miles of "front." The War Department makes almost daily announcements of casualties. That for March 31 showed totals of 181 killed in action; 163 killed by accident; 776 died of disease; 237 lost at sea—including the *Tuscania* victims—48 died of wounds; 22 captured; 41 missing and 780 wounded.

On March 6 President Wilson established four classes of decorations for service: 1. Distinguished service cross. 2. Distinguished service medal. 3. Service chevrons. 4. Wound chevrons. Several of the crosses and medals have been conferred.

(This record is as of March 31 and is to be continued)